

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 038201

EXDIS

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SUBJECT: BRIEFING OF PRCLO (ACTING CHEIF ON MIDDLE EAST
FEBRUARY 10
REF: STATE 307458

1. SUMMARY: ATHERTON TOLD HAN WE BELIEVE SLOW BUT STEADY
PROGRESS IN MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS IS POSSIBLE. PRIN-
CIPAL ISSUES STILL TO BE RESOLVED BETWEEN ISRAEL AND
EGYPT -ONCERN (A) ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS IN SINAI AND (B)
LANGUAGE IN DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES ON PALESTINIAN
CONFIDENTIAL

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PROBLEM WHICH WILL PERMIT MODERATE ARABS, PRINCIPALLY
JORDAN AND HOPEFULLY PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATIVES, TO JOIN
THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS. IMPORTANT RESULT OF CARTER-SADAT
MEETING WAS SADAT DECISION TO STICK WITH NEGOTIATING
PROCESS, ALTHOUGH SADAT THINKING IN TERMS OF WEEKS RATHER
THAN MONTHS FOR THERE TO BE TANGIBLE PROGRESS ON KEY
ISSUES. HAN STRESSED IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORT FOR SADAT IN
PREVENTING RETURN OF SOVIET HEGEMONISM TO MIDDLE EAST, AND
CONGRUENCE OF INTERESTS OF CHINA AND U.S. IN THIS OBJECTIVE.
END SUMMARY.

2. ACTING CHIEF OF PRCLC HAN HSU MET WITH ASSISTANT SECRETARY ATHERTON FOR A DISCUSSION OF THE MIDDLE EAST SITUATION IN LIGHT OF SADAT'S VISIT. REFERRING TO BRIEFING GIVEN HAN DEC. 21 BY MR. SAUNDERS, MR. ATHERTON TOLD HAN THE U.S. STILL BELIEVES THAT THE NEW SITUATION CREATED BY PRESIDENT SADAT'S NOVEMBER VISIT TO JERUSALEM HAS OPENED UP NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE. ALTHOUGH THERE WERE GREAT EXPECTATIONS AT THE TIME OF SADAT'S JERUSALEM TRIP, IT SOON BECAME APPARENT THAT OLD REALITIES DO NOT CHANGE OVERNIGHT, DESPITE POSITIVE NEW ATMOSPHERE. THE PROBLEM HAS BEEN TO TRANSFORM THE POSITIVE NEW ATMOSPHERE INTO A CONCRETE NEGOTIATING PROCESS. PRESIDENT SADAT HAD HOPED TO REACH AGREEMENT WITH BEGIN AT DEC. 25 ISMAILIA SUMMIT ON A DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES FOR A COMPREHENSIVE PEACE SETTLEMENT THAT WOULD PERMIT THE JORDANIANS AND, HOPEFULLY, THE MODERATE PALESTINIANS AND ULTIMATELY THE SYRIANS TO JOIN THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS. HOWEVER, HE AND BEGIN WERE UNABLE TO AGREE ON LANGUAGE FOR A PRINCIPLE DEALING WITH THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION. INSTEAD, THEY CREATED TWO COMMITTEES TO CARRY ON THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS: A MILITARY COMMITTEE TO DEAL WITH BILATERAL EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI ISSUES, CONFIDENTIAL

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AND A POLITICAL COMMITTEE WHICH, IN THE FIRST INSTANCE, WOULD TRY TO PRODUCE AN AGREED DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES. TWO DAYS INTO ITS FIRST MEETING, SADAT WITHDREW THE EGYPTIAN DELEGATION TO THE POLITICAL TALKS IN JERUSALEM BECAUSE HE FELT THAT ISRAEL WAS NOT BEING SUFFICIENTLY FORTHCOMING IN RESPONSE TO HIS INITIATIVE. SPECIFICALLY, HE RESENTED ISRAEL'S STATED INTENTION TO RETAIN THE SINAI SETTLEMENTS AND ITS UNWILLINGNESS TO AGREE THAT THE PRINCIPLE OF WITHDRAWAL APPLIES ALSO TO THE WEST BANK AND GAZA.

3. PRESIDENT CARTER INVITED SADAT TO WASHINGTON TO DISCUSS THE SITUATION IN AN EFFORT TO KEEP THE MOMENTUM OF THE NEGOTIATIONS GOING. THE MEETING ALSO GAVE US A CHANCE TO IMPRESS UPON SADAT THE NEED FOR PATIENCE AND STEADINESS IN ORDER TO RESOLVE VERY DEEP-SEATED DIFFERENCES. PRESIDENT SADAT LEFT FEELING ENCOURAGED AND SAYING THAT HE WOULD STICK WITH THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS. IT IS CLEAR, HOWEVER, THAT HE IS THINKING IN TERMS OF WEEKS RATHER THAN MONTHS FOR THERE TO BE TANGIBLE PROGRESS ON KEY ISSUES. PRESIDENT CARTER HAS ASKED MR. ATHERTON TO RETURN TO THE MIDDLE EAST TO CONTINUE HIS EFFORTS TO

BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN EGYPT AND ISRAEL ON A DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES. MR. ATHERTON WILL LEAVE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST SOON AFTER FOREIGN MINISTER DAYAN'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON ON FEBRUARY 16.

4. MR. ATHERTON SAID IN SUMMARY THAT EGYPT AND ISRAEL REMAIN AT ODDS OVER TWO PROBLEM ISSUES. ON THE BILATERAL SIDE, ISRAEL HAS AGREED ULTIMATELY TO WITHDRAW FROM SINAI TO THE 1967 BORDER, WHICH REPRESENTS A MAJOR EVOLUTION FROM THE POSITION OF EARLIER ISRAELI GOVERNMENTS, BUT BEGIN CONTINUES TO INSIST ON RETAINING ISRAEL'S SETTLEMENTS IN THE SINAI. PRESIDENT SADAT IS PREPARED TO NEGOTIATE ALL KINDS OF SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS BUT SAYS HE CONFIDENTIAL

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WILL NOT ACCEPT THE RETENTION OF ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS. ON THE MULTILATERAL SIDE, ISRAEL AGAIN MOVED CONSIDERABLY BEYOND ITS EARLIER POSITION CONCERNING THE WEST BANK AND GAZA WITH THE BEGIN PLAN WHICH WOULD GIVE SELF-RULE TO THE PALESTINIAN INHABITANTS WHILE RETAINING AN ISRAELI MILITARY PRESENCE. EGYPT AGREES ON THE NEED FOR AN EXTENDED TRANSITION PERIOD BUT IS INSISTING THAT AT THE END OF IT ISRAEL BE PREPARED TO WITHDRAW ITS TROOPS AND PROVIDE FOR THE SELF-DETERMINATION OF THE INHABITANTS.

5. PRESIDENT SADAT WANTS VERY MUCH TO BRING THE OTHER ARABS, PARTICULARLY KING HUSSEIN, INTO THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS AND IS STICKING TO HIS DETERMINATION TO BRING ABOUT A COMPREHENSIVE RATHER THAN A BILATERAL PEACE SETTLEMENT.

6. AMBASSADOR HAN RESPONDED THAT CHINA'S POSITION ON THE MIDDLE EAST IS WELL KNOWN. WHEN PREMIER HUA RECENTLY MET WITH SADAT'S SPECIAL ENVOY TUHAMI, HUA TOLD HIM THAT CHINA SUPPORTS PRESIDENT SADAT'S INITIATIVE ON THE UNDERSTANDING THAT EGYPT WILL CONTINUE TO INSIST ON RECOVERY OF OCCUPIED ARAB LAND, PALESTINIAN NATIONAL RIGHTS, AND A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT.

7. HAN SAID THE U.S. NOW HAS THE UPPER HAND IN THE MIDDLE EAST OVER THE USSR. IF THE U.S. CAN RESTRAIN ISRAEL IT CAN RETAIN ITS "TEMPORARY" UPPER HAND. THE MIDDLE EAST IS NOW AT A POINT OF CRITICAL CHANGE. THE U.S. MUST KEEP THE PRESSURE ON ISRAEL AND HELP SADAT SO THAT WE MAY CONTINUE TO EXCLUDE SOVIET "HEGEMONISM." "WHAT ARE YOUR PROSPECTS FOR SUCCESS?" THE AMBASSADOR ASKED.

8. MR. ATHERTON REPLIED THAT THE TALKS WILL BE DIFFICULT CONFIDENTIAL

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BUT THAT WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE CONSEQUENCES OF FAILURE OF THESE TALKS WILL BE THE CREATION OF A DANGEROUS SITUATION FOR BOTH THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE WHOLE WORLD. WE

AGREED THAT THE PRINCIPAL BENEFACTOR OF FAILURE WOULD BE THE USSR. SO WE HAVE A STRONG INCENTIVE TO CARRY ON THE EFFORT IN OUR OWN NATIONAL INTERESTS. MR. ATHERTON SUGGESTED THAT THE CHINESE STUDY THE WHITE HOUSE STATEMENT ISSUED AT THE END OF THE SADAT VISIT.

9. HAN NOTED THAT PRIME MINISTER BEGIN'S REACTION TO THE WHITE HOUSE STATEMENT INDICATED THAT ISRAEL HAS NOT CHANGED ITS "OBDURATE" POSITION. "HOW CAN YOU GET ISRAEL TO CHANGE ITS OBDURACY?" HE ASKED.

10. MR. ATHERTON SAID THAT IT IS CLEAR THAT WE HAVE DIFFERENCES WITH ISRAEL, BUT U.S.-ISRAELI RELATIONS ARE VERY COMPLICATED AND BEGIN HAS SERIOUS DOMESTIC PROBLEMS AS WELL. FOR MANY YEARS ISRAEL WAS UNWILLING TO TALK ABOUT SERIOUS TERRITORIAL WITHDRAWALS OR A SOLUTION TO THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION BECAUSE IT SAW NO WILLINGNESS ON THE ARAB SIDE TO MAKE REAL PEACE. THE SADAT INITIATIVE CHANGED THIS, BUT AFTER 30 YEARS OF SUSPICIOUSNESS, IT IS HARD FOR ISRAEL TO CHANGE SUDDENLY. NONETHELESS, CHANGES ARE TAKING PLACE AS EVIDENCED BY THE BEGIN PLAN AND THE WILLINGNESS TO WITHDRAW FROM THE SINAI.

11. TO RESPOND SPECIFICALLY TO HAN'S QUESTION, ATHERTON SAID WE WILL CONTINUE DOING WHAT WE HAVE DONE, I.E., PERSEVERING WITH OUR MEDIATION EFFORTS. WE DO HAVE A SENSE OF URGENCY AND RECOGNIZE THAT NEGOTIATIONS CANNOT DRAG OUT INDEFINITELY. WE WILL CONTINUE TO URGE JORDAN AND SAUDI ARABIA TO SUPPORT SADAT. THE UNWILLINGNESS OF SOME ARAB STATES TO ACCEPT THE IDEA OF A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT WITH ISRAEL HINDERS OUR EFFORTS AND WE MUST DO WHAT IS POSSIBLE TO INFLUENCE THE LESS MODERATE ARABS NOT TO CONFIDENTIAL

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OPPOSE THE PEACE PROCESS.

12. ATHERTON SAID THE NEGOTIATIONS WILL ULTIMATELY HAVE TO COME BACK TO GENEVA AND TO INVOLVE THE USSR, BUT FOR NOW, THE PRINCIPAL OUTSIDE ROLE IS FOR THE UNITED STATES AND WE RECOGNIZE THIS. HAN SAID THAT CHINA HAS URGED THE ARAB "HOT HEADS" TO BEWARE OF SOVIET AGITATION AND MANIPULATION. HE ASKED IF WE EXPECTED CHANGES WITHIN THE ISRAELI LEADERSHIP IN LIGHT OF THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BEGIN AND DAYAN. MR. ATHERTON SAID WE DO NOT EXPECT ANY CHANGES IN THE NEAR TERM.

13. CONCERNING THE PALESTINIANS, HAN NOTED THAT ON THE ONE HAND THE U.S. SAYS THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION IS THE HEART OF THE MATTER, BUT ON THE OTHER HAND, IT DOES NOT RECOGNIZE THE PLO AND IS AMBIGUOUS ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINIAN SELF-DETERMINATION. MR. ATHERTON SAID THAT

THE PROBLEM WITH OUR DEALING WITH THE PLO IS THAT IT STILL ADHERES OFFICIALLY TO THE POSITION THAT ISRAEL SHOULD DISAPPEAR AND REFUSES TO RECOGNIZE ISRAEL'S RIGHT TO EXIST. WE DO REALIZE, HOWEVER, THAT THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE MUST PARTICIPATE IN THE DETERMINATION OF THEIR OWN FUTURE. AT THE SAME TIME, THERE ARE OTHER PARTIES WITH A STRONG INTEREST IN THE FUTURE OF THE WEST BANK AND GAZA, INCLUDING ISRAEL, FOR WHOM IT IS A VITAL SECURITY ISSUE, AND JORDAN AND EGYPT, WHICH BOTH ADMINISTERED PARTS OF THE AREA BEFORE 1967.

14. HAN NOTED THAT SADAT AND CARTER EXPRESSED C
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